



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Preparing Wisconsin Students to Compete in the Global Economy

*Rep. Gary Hebl's Testimony before the Assembly Education Committee
on Assembly Bill 814 – the World Languages Bill*

March 6, 2008

Chairman Davis, members of the Assembly Education Committee, ladies and gentlemen:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 814, the World Languages Bill, which I co-authored with Senator Julie Lassa of Stevens Point. I would also like to thank Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster's staff for coming today to voice her support as well.

Mr. Chairman and members, you all know how we live in a rapidly changing world where *local* challenges must be met with *global* connections. In order for our students here in Wisconsin to be competitive in the international economy, the State Legislature must make sure that our kids have every advantage we can give them. For our students to compete globally they must be able to communicate with different people from all around the world. And, as Superintendent Burmaster's staff will explain, studies clearly demonstrate that starting foreign language instruction at an early age dramatically increases a student's ability to absorb many different types of information. That is why Sen. Lassa and I have introduced this legislation.

As outlined in the LRB analysis, AB-814 is a pretty simple bill. This legislation would set up a series of pilot programs in school districts to add elementary instruction in world languages. Under the bill, a school board may apply for a six-year grant to pay for a portion of the compensation of up to two teachers and to phase in world languages instruction in grades one to six. AB-814 also provides professional development funding for teachers to implement this bill.

My office has been working closely with DPI after reviewing the fiscal estimate of the bill. I wanted to let you all know, that anticipated cost will be half of what was originally estimated for the first two years of the program. If any members need any further clarification on this issue, DPI staff is available to answer any questions you may have.

Ultimately, I believe this legislation is about expanding opportunities for Wisconsin students. While global competitors like China are pushing policies that mandate students to be fluent in several languages by the time they graduate, students in the United States and here in Wisconsin are running the risk of falling behind. The time to act is now. Keeping Wisconsin's education system strong requires that we provide our students with the tools they need to communicate and work with their peers overseas and at home.

Thank you for your time and interest on this bill, and I would be happy to answer any questions.